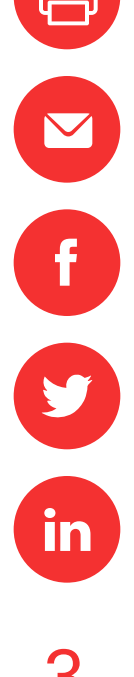


Matilde Rosina
Iole Fontana
September 17th, 2024

The tools of external migration policy in EU member states

0 comments | 3 shares

Estimated reading time: 6 minutes



3 Shares

*External migration policies, in which states cooperate with third countries to help manage migration, are now increasingly common. Drawing on new research, **Matilde Rosina and Iole Fontana** identify the key tools used by EU member states to implement these policies.*

In a rapidly changing world, countries are forging unexpected alliances to tackle irregular migration. From **Italy's recent partnership with Albania** to the **EU's collaboration with Egypt** and the **UK's ties with Rwanda**, a new migration system is emerging, centred on enhancing the "external dimension" of migration policies.

The **external dimension of migration policies** refers to the involvement of third countries in the management of migration. The topic has received significant attention in recent years, particularly when it comes to the **EU level**. Yet, we know very little about how it works at the level of individual member states.

In a **recent study**, we conceptualise the external dimension of EU member states' migration policies, identify the key tools it relies on and examine how it relates to EU initiatives. We do so by proposing an analytical framework and applying it to the case of Italy using an original dataset covering over 30 years and 125 instruments.

Our findings suggest the external dimension of migration policies is by no means an exclusive realm of the EU. Instead, it is well-developed at the member state level too, having expanded quantitatively and qualitatively alongside (and despite) EU initiatives.

The toolbox of external migration policy

What exactly does the external dimension of EU member states' migration policies entail? While return agreements might be the first thing that comes to mind, our analysis uncovers a far richer landscape beneath the surface.

We identify a set of nine instruments that constitute the "policy toolbox" of the external dimension of EU member states' migration policies. The scope is vast, spanning schemes establishing **entry quotas** and programmes to **resettle refugees**, as well as instances of **political dialogue** and **military missions** targeting migration objectives. As a testament to the dynamic and evolving nature of these policies, today we could add a tenth instrument: the offshoring of asylum processes, as illustrated by **Italy's recent partnership with Albania**. The full list of instruments is as follows:

- Readmission agreements
- Quota schemes
- Agreements on labour migration
- Resettlement schemes
- Technical and operational agreements
- Migration-specific agreements
- Migration clauses in broader agreements
- Political dialogue
- Military missions

To explore the relevance and use of different tools, we constructed a database focusing on Italy's migration cooperation with 17 partner countries across the **broader Mediterranean** region. The findings are revealing.

First, while Italy employed all nine types of instruments over the past three decades, it showed a marked preference for *informal* tools. Specifically, political dialogue and technical agreements (such as collaborations between **police forces** and the **provision of military vessels**) dominated Italy's approach, accounting for two thirds of its new instruments since 2010.

Moreover, Italy's external dimension of migration policy was notably more expansive than the EU's. From 1990 to 2022, Italy introduced over twice as many of these tools, with 125 tools compared to the EU's 61. In short, Italy's external dimension of migration policy saw significant growth, but also a trend towards informalisation.

The "three Cs" of member state-EU cooperation

How do these tools align with EU-level initiatives? Is the interaction characterised by confrontation, or do they operate in harmony? We argue that interactions between member states and the EU in the external dimension of migration policies are shaped by "three Cs": competition, convergence and complementarity.

Competition occurs when conflicting interests surface, leading member states to prioritise their national agendas over supranational cooperation. This is particularly evident in matters concerning returns, as demonstrated by Italy's readmission agreements with Algeria and Tunisia.

Despite the European Commission being tasked with negotiating readmission agreements with these countries in 2002 and 2014, Italy pursued its own bilateral negotiations, finalising return agreements in 2008 and 2020. This highlights a competitive stance between member states (Italy in this case) and the EU, with the former unwilling to let go of national instruments, thereby weakening the Commission's efforts to secure EU-wide agreements.

The second scenario sees a convergence of efforts between member states and the EU. Convergence emerges when member states and the EU align on shared objectives and priorities, with their individual instruments reinforcing each other.

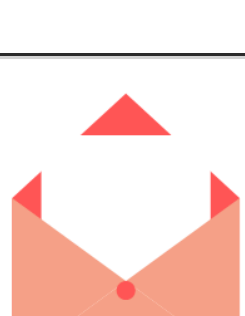
Italy's humanitarian corridors well-exemplify this pattern. They were not only **praised by the European Commission** and adopted by other member states but also played a pivotal role in advancing the broader EU's strategy for establishing legal pathways. This resulted in a cooperative approach between Italy and the EU to enhance resettlement efforts.

Lastly, the third scenario indicates complementarity in the efforts of member states and the EU. Complementarity arises when member states effectively act on behalf of the EU, generating new opportunities and supporting the advancement of the external dimension of the EU's migration policies. This is illustrated by situations where member states with strong bilateral ties serve as facilitators or mediators to enhance dialogue with specific countries at the EU level, as Italy did in the **lead-up to the 2023 EU-Tunisia agreement**.

In conclusion, the external dimension of member states' migration policies is both extensive and intricately linked with the EU's approach. Through convergence, competition and complementarity, a multifaceted and dynamic network of interactions emerges between national and EU instruments.

*For more information, see the authors' accompanying paper in the **Journal of Common Market Studies***

*Note: This article gives the views of the author, not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy or the London School of Economics. Featured image credit: **Alessia Pierdomenico / Shutterstock.com***



Subscribe to our newsletter

About the author



Matilde Rosina is a Visiting Fellow in the European Institute of the London School of Economics and Political Science.

Matilde Rosina



Iole Fontana is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Catania.

Iole Fontana

Posted In: EU Foreign Affairs | LSE Comment | Politics

Leave a Reply

Related Posts

EU Foreign Affairs

EU Foreign Affairs

EU Foreign Affairs

Cristian Nitoiu

Lessons from the Balkans: How justice can be achieved for the victims of war crimes in Ukraine
MAY 13TH, 2022

How civil society can foster locally led development in the Black Sea region
AUGUST 16TH, 2023

Donald Trump's rhetoric has only highlighted the already growing rift between the EU and the US
JANUARY 27TH, 2018

Avoiding a new Cold War: The future of EU-Russia relations in the context of the Ukraine crisis
MARCH 22ND, 2016

